



NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Drivers Since 1982

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Testimony for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee On House Bills 4423 through 4427, October 13, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thanks for letting me return for questions after the September 29th session ran out of time. I have some comments about other testimonies and debates you and I have seen.

Others said we need "select segments" or "studies" first. The Michigan State Police increased limits on about 300 rural, urban and freeway segments to 85th percentile speeds and NONE needed to be rolled back for poor safety results. The studies are done, we just need implementation of 85th percentile limits.

Some said fatalities increased after 1987 with 65 limits. A U of M study didn't include the vehicle miles traveled factor, making that study invalid. After 1987, fatality rates declined by more in states that adopted 65 limits versus those that kept 55 limits.

Insurance interests oppose no points for violations up to 5 mph. Once we have 85th percentile limits, most tickets for 3 or 5 mph over will likely be unfair "gotcha" traps at places like the bottom of hills.

"Home rule" or "local control" arguments mean "let us keep our lucrative speed traps". Many communities will never set proper speed limits until forced to do so by state law. AAA wanted consistent limits based on scientific studies and these bills will achieve that goal.

Seven states permit 80 limits on rural freeways. The before & after studies show 85th percentile speeds do not significantly change and neither do fatalities. Most drivers do NOT go 90 mph, that is a total myth.

We could do a partial fix to post 75 limits, but with no safety gain over posting correct 80 limits with our current 85th percentile speeds of 78 to 82 mph on most rural freeways. Remember, the State Police and MDOT can set lower limits wherever necessary.

The insurance industry says to set posted limits based on access points, roadside development, sight distance, pedestrians & cyclists, road characteristics, and other visible hazards. These factors are already included in the 85th percentile speeds. Counting them twice creates artificially low limits and lucrative speed traps.

Some worry about speed limit differentials between cars and trucks. Unbiased research shows differential posted limits have no safety value. What will be true is the "Keep Right Except to Pass" behavior will improve dramatically. Faster cars will pass easily, slower cars and trucks will keep right. Trucks will legally maintain their preferred speeds of 65 to 70 mph. Most speed variance conflicts will simply not happen.

Sometimes design speed comes up, but design speed is an extremely conservative worst-case set of factors. Passenger cars routinely exceed design speeds by at least 50% under good conditions in complete safety.

In short, we need 85th percentile posted speed limits almost everywhere to end the racket of speed traps and unjustified insurance surcharges -- along with getting the resulting smoother and safer traffic flows that proper 85th percentile posted limits tend to produce.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.

Respectfully,
James C. Walker for the National Motorists Association